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## **Special Olympics Grows School Program, Reaches More Special Education Students in Bay Area**

**PLEASANT HILL, April 1, 2008** – Because of the enthusiastic response from families and teachers, Special Olympics is able to reach more children with developmental disabilities right where they are - in Bay Area public schools. More than 1,000 special education students from participating public schools have the opportunity to train and compete in team sports thanks to the innovative and relatively new Schools Partnership Program.

“The benefits to the kids, teachers, schools and community are just huge,” says Marybeth McMahon, executive vice president of Special Olympics Northern California. “The kids learn about teamwork and working hard without giving up; the teachers have one more helpful teaching tool, and students feel empowered and accepted.”

The Schools Partnership Program also has an added benefit. It is free. Participating students, teachers and individual schools receive equipment, curriculum, uniforms and sometimes funds for a teacher on special assignment. The Schools Partnership Program currently is offered to participating schools in Contra Costa County, San Mateo County, and San Francisco.

“For many years, people with intellectual disabilities have been kept in the shadows, said Special Olympics Chairman Timothy Shriver. “But Special Olympics is helping to open the doors of opportunity for our athletes to be true leaders, not only on the sports team, but throughout their school.

“In the Bay Area, the Schools Partnership Program is the fastest growing segment of the Special Olympics program, reaching out to an athlete base that just needed the chance to participate; nationwide it is the model program for growth,” Shriver added. “In times of economic instability in schools here in California, Special Olympics is providing funding to ensure a physical education curriculum exists for individuals with intellectual disabilities.”

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Teachers agree. "With California public schools under such financial duress, it's nice to know something like this can be done with very little resources from the school," said Paul Zager, a special education teacher currently on assignment to coordinate the Special Olympics program for the San Francisco Unified School District.

In San Francisco, the Program has been enthusiastically embraced by many students, families, teachers, school officials. Already more than 300 special education students from 26 San Francisco schools are gearing up for the track and field season. They are beginning their 10 weeks of training in preparation for a track meet at Kezar Stadium on May 23.

The Schools Partnership Program is being piloted in Contra Costa County this spring and 130 students from several schools are training for two track meets - April 25 at Liberty High School, and May 16 at Ygnacio Valley High School.

In San Mateo County, 24 elementary school teams are preparing for their April 3 Basketball Invitational in San Carlos.

The Schools Partnership Program was piloted in San Mateo County in 2001 with about 70 students participating in track and field. The Program differs from Special Olympics' more familiar community-based program in that it takes place entirely within the school day and focuses on school age children.

### **About Special Olympics Northern California**

Special Olympics Northern California is a free year-round sports training and competition program for children and adults with developmental disabilities. More than 13,000 athletes compete in 178 competitions throughout the region in 19 sports. This requires the extraordinary support and time of 12,700 volunteers and more than 4,600 volunteer coaches. Programs are free to all eligible athletes. Financial support comes almost exclusively from individuals, organizations, corporations, and foundations. The Schools Partnership Program is partially funded by AT&T, MedeFinance and AT&T, CBS Outdoor and Symantec.

For more information on Special Olympics Northern California, visit [www.SONC.org](http://www.SONC.org).